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1793

THE
BRITISH CRITIC,
A NEW REVIEW.

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directed.

Prospectus.

IF the number of Reviews already in existence were the only point to be considered, there could be no reason to attract the public notice to a NEW ONE. Nor is it any apparent want of knowledge, or ability in the Authors of these publications, that encourages the present Competition with them. As Critics, some of them perform their task in a distinguished manner; most of them so well, that, on the whole, the cause of Taste and Literature receives, no doubt, a great advantage from their labours. But, highly as we value Taste and Literature, and inseparably as their interests are connected with such works, there are objects of yet more importance continually presented to the mind of a Reviewer; and thence reflected to the Public in such colours as his Principles or Prejudices may chance to give. Such are the opinions that, from time to time, are published, on the two great topics of *Politics* and *Religion*. CRITICISM, though professedly the primary object of Reviews, gives place, in point of public importance, to the discussion of opinions on these subjects. It is of much less consequence to a country, whether its Writers excel in Style and Diction, in the arts of Composition, and the various branches of Literary Skill, than whether their opinions on those leading points are sound and right; and whether their defects or merits of that kind are fairly or unfairly stated by the periodical reporter.

Here then we find the evil that so much demands a Remedy. Some of our principal Reviews have long been animated by a spirit very hostile, not only to the whole establishment in Church and State, but to all that Englishmen in general hold most sacred, in the principles by which it is supported; in Politics, to Monarchy itself; in Religion, to Christianity.

It is vain to temporize, by using words too weak for what they should convey. The advocates for extravagant and democratical claims of right, have never wanted their abettors, in those dangerous publications; and Christianity, though not expressly rejected, is not to be discovered in that human invention, falsely called *Rational Christianity*; that system which diminishes the mercy of God, destroys the dignity of the Redeemer, and bends itself to every fanciful hypothesis that may chance to suit the private reason of any vain or capricious individual. Is there a Writer who would give to the multitude rights, as well as Powers, beyond all definition or controul? he is sure of countenance or commendation. Is there one who fills his pages with doubts, or with denials of all mysteries, and all that places Revelation above the invention or discovery of man? he too has found strong advocates. His blemishes are veiled, his best arguments are brought forward, his worst suppressed, or aided by others of more apparent efficacy: nor has the Reader any chance of being secured from danger, but by the soundness of his own principles, or by the caution which many have adopted, from necessity, that of viewing the whole Picture in reverse. He is invited to a specious feast, where the more the viands are poisoned, the more they are made alluring to the eye, and seductive to the appetite.

On the other hand, with respect to works favourable to our Government, or our Religion, the opposite methods are employed. The Reviewer is a Counsel constantly retained against the Crown and Church. The writer on their side is always thought to be mistaken: his abilities, if they cannot be denied, are considered as overpoised by his errors; and if he gain celebrity or profit, it must be in spite of the Reviewers, not by their assistance.

To obviate these Arts, to check the course of Misrepresentation, and give the chance of favourable hearing to the side we deem the right, is the object of the **BRITISH CRITIC**; the Authors of which, though they never will descend to any thing unfair, can only undertake to write exactly as they feel; that is, as men convinced of certain truths, and zealous to defend them, in proportion to their high importance. They are, and they declare themselves to be, firm friends to real Liberty, as established by the **BRITISH CONSTITUTION**, and to real Christianity, particularly as delivered in the **Evangelical Doctrines of the Church of England**. Such being their principles, they cannot with indifference see the security of Society endangered, or the

foundations of the Christian Faith assailed, whether by pretended friends or open enemies; and, therefore, for their sentiments upon these subjects, they look for commendation only from such persons as agree with them, in what should be maintained as everlasting truths. These are, however, undoubtedly by far the greater part of the inhabitants of this country, among whom, within the class of those who read and think, nothing has been more sincerely wished, than such an effort to resist the forces, and repel the inroads of corruption.

Alarmed by some apparent progress of what they could not but regard as false and dangerous opinions, a Society of Gentlemen published, some time ago, a *Proposal for a Reformation of Principles*. This society, consisting of persons of liberal views, and of various situations and professions, united only by the exigence of the times, which seemed to call for more than common efforts in defence of BRITISH PRINCIPLES, and BRITISH HAPPINESS, was desirous only to REFORM where previous Arts had introduced corruption: where sound opinions yet remained, to give them due support, and to PRESERVE them. Among their plans for effecting this good purpose, was that of bringing forward A REVIEW, conducted in the manner herein proposed.

Under the auspices of that society THE BRITISH CRITIC is now about to appear: the time appointed for its commencement being the FIRST of JUNE. How far it may deserve the venerable name of CRITIC, the Public will hereafter decide; but BRITISH it will certainly be found, in all its sentiments, and in the ground of its decisions; according to those principles that long have formed the glory of the British Nation. In taking such a line, if the Authors of this Review should not be able wholly to escape the charge of partiality, they are at least determined to incur no accusation of intemperance. By the scale of their own opinions, must all men judge of others; we know not of any consideration that should deter us from speaking for ourselves; and if we plainly avow our Principles, we rather should obtain the praise of honesty, than meet with censure or suspicion. A man partial to no opinions is a blank; he neither can have read nor thought. Having opinions, to affect a neutrality by which they should be totally concealed, would be to make a sacrifice without advantage; it would be to displease all parties. We would be candid, not insipid.

Having thus largely given our Reasons for the present undertaking, and expressed our feelings on the most important points connected with it, we have only now to add, that in every other quality that ought to

be required in a Review, our endeavour will be to rival, if we cannot excel, the most respectable of our competitors: favourable to merit of all kinds, and particularly to the efforts of Genius.

Finding the form already adopted for Reviews to be convenient and proper, we have not attempted innovation, where we could not promise an improvement. Our Monthly Publication will, therefore, consist, as they do, of two principal divisions: a Review at large of some productions, and a Catalogue of others, more concisely noticed.

But as it appears that the quantity has been too far increased, and three volumes in a year are thought to lay too heavy a charge on public curiosity, we purpose, by avoiding Supplements, to confine *THE BRITISH CRITIC* within Two Yearly Volumes.

Foreign Literature, however, which chiefly occupies the Supplements of other Reviews, will not be neglected by us. On the contrary, from the assistance to which we look, we are enabled to promise a peculiarly accurate and intelligent execution of that article. But as few Readers feel as much interested concerning foreign publications, as with those of their own country; and they who do, can easily obtain access to foreign journals; we shall keep this part within a moderate extent, and assign to it only one division of our Monthly Catalogue: which will consequently be distinguished into two parts—*British Catalogue* and *Foreign Catalogue*.

As we commence our Undertaking in the Middle of the Year, we shall neither go out of the current year for subjects of Criticism, nor bind ourselves to notice every work that has already appeared in 1793; but, from the date of our first publication, we mean to make our notice general; and, if possible, to keep pace with the publications that are issued, better than has been usual with reviews. Long arrears of Criticism are prejudicial, in many instances, to authors; and always are unpleasing to the public.

Of any merits that may be peculiar to us, we shall leave our Readers both to judge and speak. Learning and Sagacity must be shown by actual proof, not promised and held forth in previous boastings. If we have them, they will plead effectually in our behalf: if they should be wanting, the more we had commended ourselves, the greater would be the public disappointment. The attempt itself argues some persuasion of ability to execute the task: Success will justify our hopes, but not relax our efforts.

APRIL 22, 1793.

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